raised to his entry. He said he thought perhaps to buy you for himself. There were certain pleasures the House would put no price to...fearing you damaged.

I told myself I came back tonight to put you from my mind and consign you to your fate. To become the stranger I never was.

The swift light in your face quickly faded. You were tense and wary as I led you upstairs by your chains. I did not unlock them, but bound you to the bed to remind you--and myself--of what you are. I took your legs over my shoulders and bore down on you, pressing my taut and aching cock to your tightly clenched orifice.

You gasped and bit your lip as I entered abruptly, driving myself through the closed muscle into the lush coolness inside you. I shuddered, held myself still for a moment, the exquisite sensation threatening to overwhelm me. Gaining control, I thrust fiercely, fighting my enjoyment to keep my dominance. Your body refused to respond until I neared my climax and the fire caught us both. We struggled against each other then, against our own flame, both wanting denial more than pleasure. The orgasm was sharp and cruel, tearing from us, and we screamed in pain and fury.

I let you lie there, chained, thighs and belly streaked with my semen and your own, as I rose and with forced leisure cleansed my own body. I poured a glass of kavva and stood on the terrace, listening to the play of the fountains, watching the foilage glimmering in starlight, and the faint, iridescent sparkle of the forcefield enclosing the garden. I breathed deeply, deliberately, forcing myself to enjoy the evening fragrance, the sweetness of the night blooming liata, the heady resin of the scarlet spice trees. A pungent waft of incense.

The earthsea scent of your flesh lingering on mine....

Below me two figures moved, pale flesh, anonymous in the darkness. I heard a soft moan...a little cry...laughter....

I returned to the bed and unwound your chains from the laquered posts. Head averted, slowly you lowered your arms, till they came to rest crossed on your chest, covering, touching the pale, sticky shine of the sperm I could see pooled between your ribs. Your face turned back to me, tight with anger, your voice low and cold as you said, "I didn't choose to be a whore."

"You are insolent, slave," I answered, trying to match your coldness.

Your body tensed as if you would strike me. Perhaps you would. Your eyes defied me, refusing to play the game I paid so well to play with you tonight. That you are bound to play--or be whipped for your denial.

You do not act like a whore, but like a lover betrayed.

This House was not your choice...but it has been your life, child of a conquered planet. You have learned certain skills to survive, forced to live by your wits and your beauty, your strength a toy for the amusement of aliens. Why should you not use those skills against me, the enemy? I told myself you were clever enough to pretend, to practice your wiles in hope I would purchase you, besotted with passion.

I have not asked what it would cost to buy you. It would be too high a price for both of us.

You think it would be better? Shall I take you home and introduce you to she-who-is-my-wife? She resents her bonding to the legendary half-breed. She has no love for me, but is displeased that her lack of feeling is reciprocated. There is no peace between us, though our marriage keeps peace between two great clans.

Wealth, power, lovers do not satisfy T'Pring. She has a lust for cruelty. Shall I leave you to face her vengeance when I fly the stars? My father would not protect you. He resents the one thing we seem to share...this penchant for humans.

I had a favorite once before. Two years ago I found her poisoned. Her pale hair spread like a fan on the tiles, her body bloated and twisted. The child she would have borne me a red smear on her thighs.

Leila...she was sweet water as you are bright, intoxicating flame. Yet you are alike. She saw me too, always. Saw through my ruses and spoke always to what I meant, if not what I said. She would not have lies between us.

I have lied tonight...and chained you to that lie.

I move away from your reproachful gaze, crossing to my scattered clothes. You are here beside me, kneeling, your arms around me. So bold before, and now you cling. I tell myself to take the chains, to jerk you to the floor and leave as I planned. You raise your face and your expression has changed again. Your smile is bitter, tremulous, mocking me and yourself. Your eyes dark and full of pain.

"Stay," you whisper.

Do you see that it is the last time...that it must be the last time? I want you too much.

Let my touch be truth at least. As yours has been.

Slowly my hand winds through your barbarian's clipped hair. It flows through my fingers cool and liquid smooth as water, faintly rustling like sand. Your breath is on me, warm against me so I harden once again...so soon. I hear myself moan as your mouth takes me. Tender wet silk membranes, the keen edge of teeth, soft stroking muscle of tongue. You fasten on me, sucking desperately, and now I am desperate too, hungering to taste you.

Pulling away, I press you to the floor, smooth and sweetly chill beneath our fevered flesh. Heads bent to loins, our bodies mirror each other. Two mouths descend on two straining cocks. Two hands shape the slope of back and mold the swelling curve of hip. Paired fingers part the mounded cheeks, tease the damp curled tendrils...seeking the moist pulsing rim that contracts, then opens to their touch. We enter gently, probing to reach the deepest point of pleasure. Fingers burrowing, cocks thrusting, mouths sucking, we devour each other...our only desire to drink each other's hearts.

My other hand finds your temple. Our bodies jolt and quiver with the burning current of desire Melded, we plunge deeper and deeper. Linked to form one crazed, craving creature, we drown ourselves in fire. Our flesh melting, dissolving into flame, flame bursting, exploding into light liquid light pouring from us into us...filling our souls with an oblivion of brightness.